

Brutalization (The) of Childhood





THE BRUTALIZATION OF CHILDHOOD.

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THE action of the Boston School Committee in voting to prohibit the practice of vivisection in the public schools is condemned as unnecessary in certain quarters, on the ground that vivisection has not been adopted here and is not likely to be adopted, but the friends of sound and wholesome education will be inclined to believe that the bar has been put up none too soon. In other large cities of this country teachers have taken it upon themselves to adopt vivisection for the purpose of instructing young pupils in the elements of anatomy and physiology, and where vivisection is not employed it is becoming the custom, far too often, to resort to the dissection of the bodies of dead animals for the same purpose. . . .

There is such a thing as brutalizing the youthful mind. By dwelling upon the material aspects of life there is danger of crushing out that feeling of sympathy and wonder which is the bloom of childhood and the source of all the multiform pleasures associated with the cultivation of the imaginative faculties.

A child naturally regards domestic animals with something like a sense of comradeship. The dog, the cat, the horse are to the children playmates and friends. Stories of the devotion of these members of the lower order of creation to their human companions are numerous and authentic. And to chil-

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dren the charm of living pets is no doubt largely due to the fact that they are endowed with the mystery of life. In them the child personifies his own thoughts and emotions. He asks that the pet be treated as he is treated; he fancies that he understands its language; he is happy if his pet is happy, and sorrowful if his pet is hurt or ill-used. Take this same child, with all his fresh and ingenuous sympathies active, into the schoolroom and confront him with a demonstration upon the body of a puppy or a kitten, and what is the result? One of two things. Either he is irreparably wounded in his sensibilities and shocked into such utter loathing that the lesson, as a means of acquiring facts, is valueless; or his curiosity hardens his heart, and from that time on the child is lost in the devotee of science. If the child is naturally cruel, his disposition to cruelty is increased many fold. It will be hard to make him understand that vivisection may not be practised outside of the schoolroom as well as in it, or that if his pet is merely a bundle of bones, muscles and nerves, it is anything more than a mechanical toy or deserving of any more considerate treatment.

It is well that children should be taught at an early age the fundamental principles of hygiene, but colored plates and charts will supply all the details of physiology or anatomy that they need to know, and scientific instruction in these branches may with every advantage be postponed till the finer qualities of the mind and the appreciation of moral obligations have attained a fair degree of development. There is no such sacred object in the world as the mind of a young and innocent child, and those who

would debase and brutalize its activities will have much to answer for.

The truth is that the movement to introduce vivisection, or at least dissection, into the schools, is part of the mistaken tendency in educational circles to hold that education consists in the acquirement of facts. To learn facts, to learn more facts, to learn as many facts as possible, at the expense of ideality and originality of thought — this is the apparent aim of modern scholastic instruction. By and by the world will see its mistake and realize that the true education is what the name implies, "drawing out," a fostering of the essential faculties of the individual. Then school committees will not be obliged to vote that in the schools under their supervision vivisection shall not be practised.

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